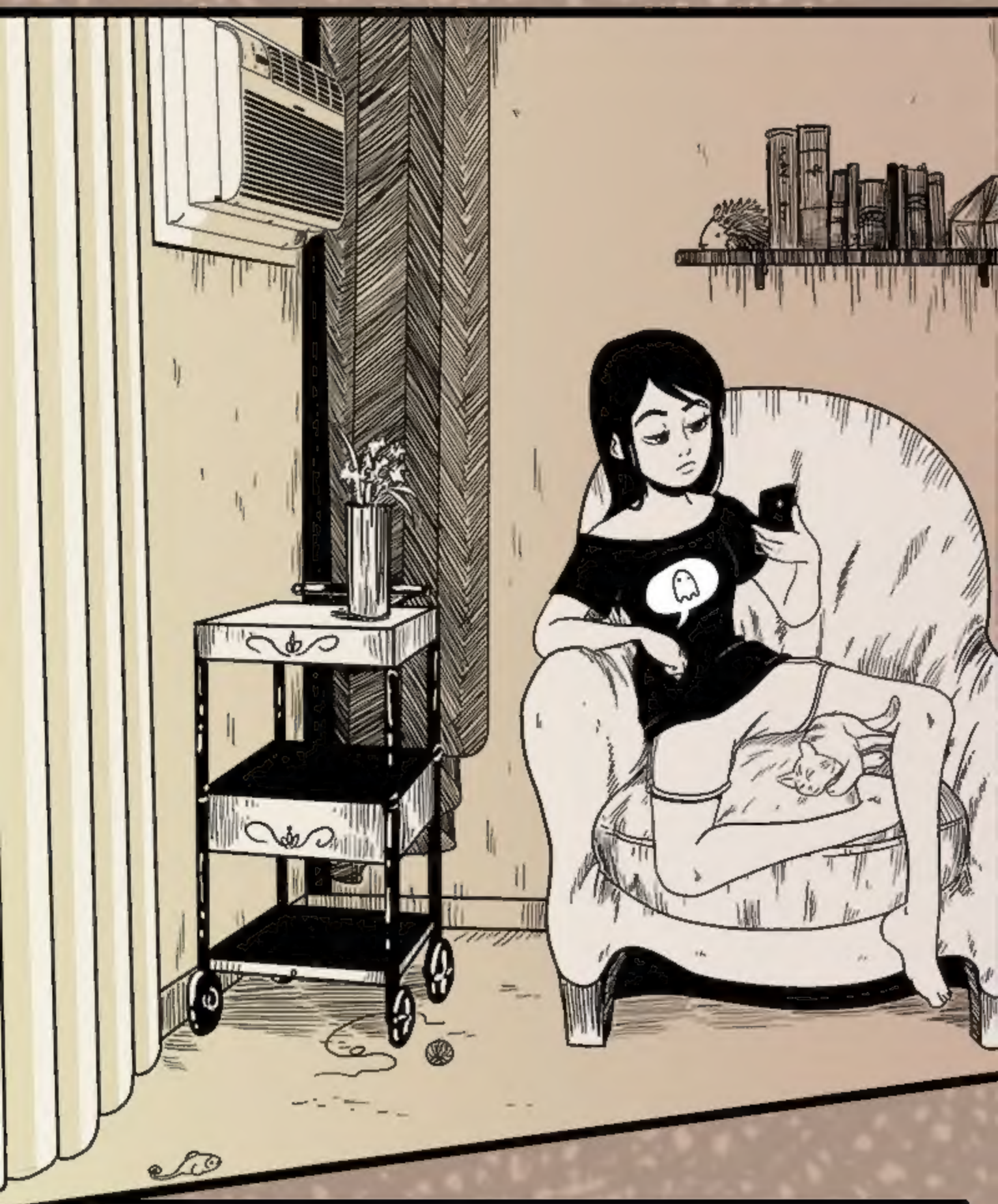
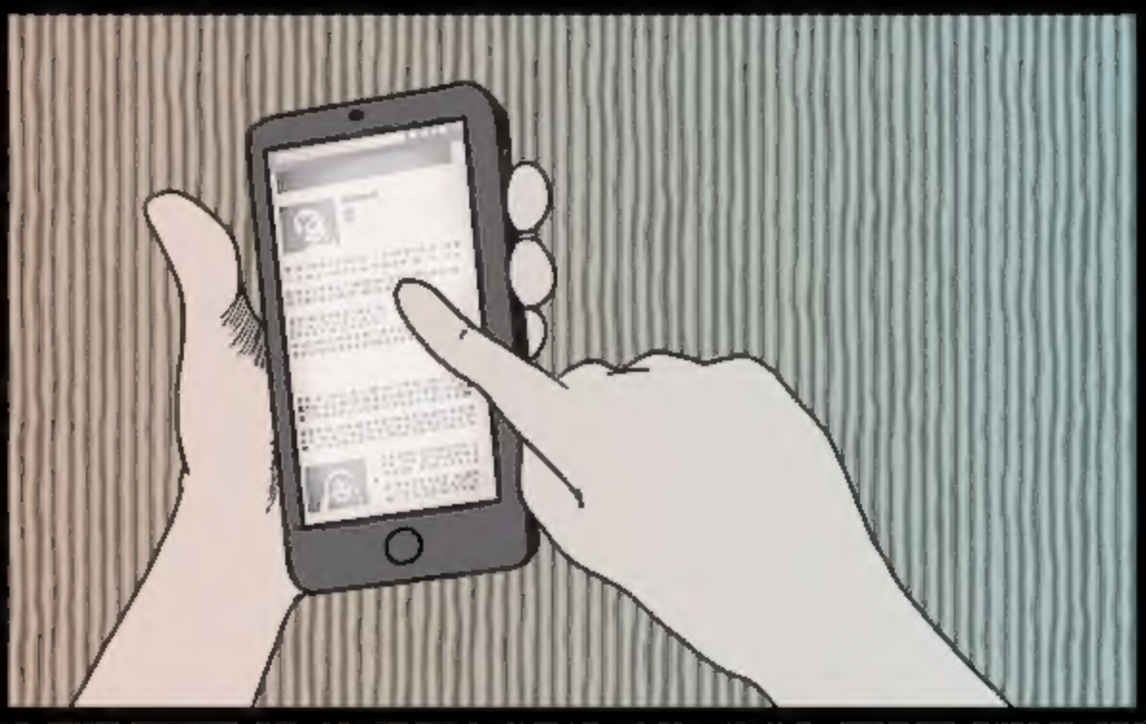
JUST BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF SUMMER, I FOUND MYSELF NEEDING TO EARN SOME EXTRA MONEY TO MAKE ENDS MEET.

I'D KIND OF LET SOME BIGGER BILLS GET AWAY FROM ME FOR A FEW MONTHS.

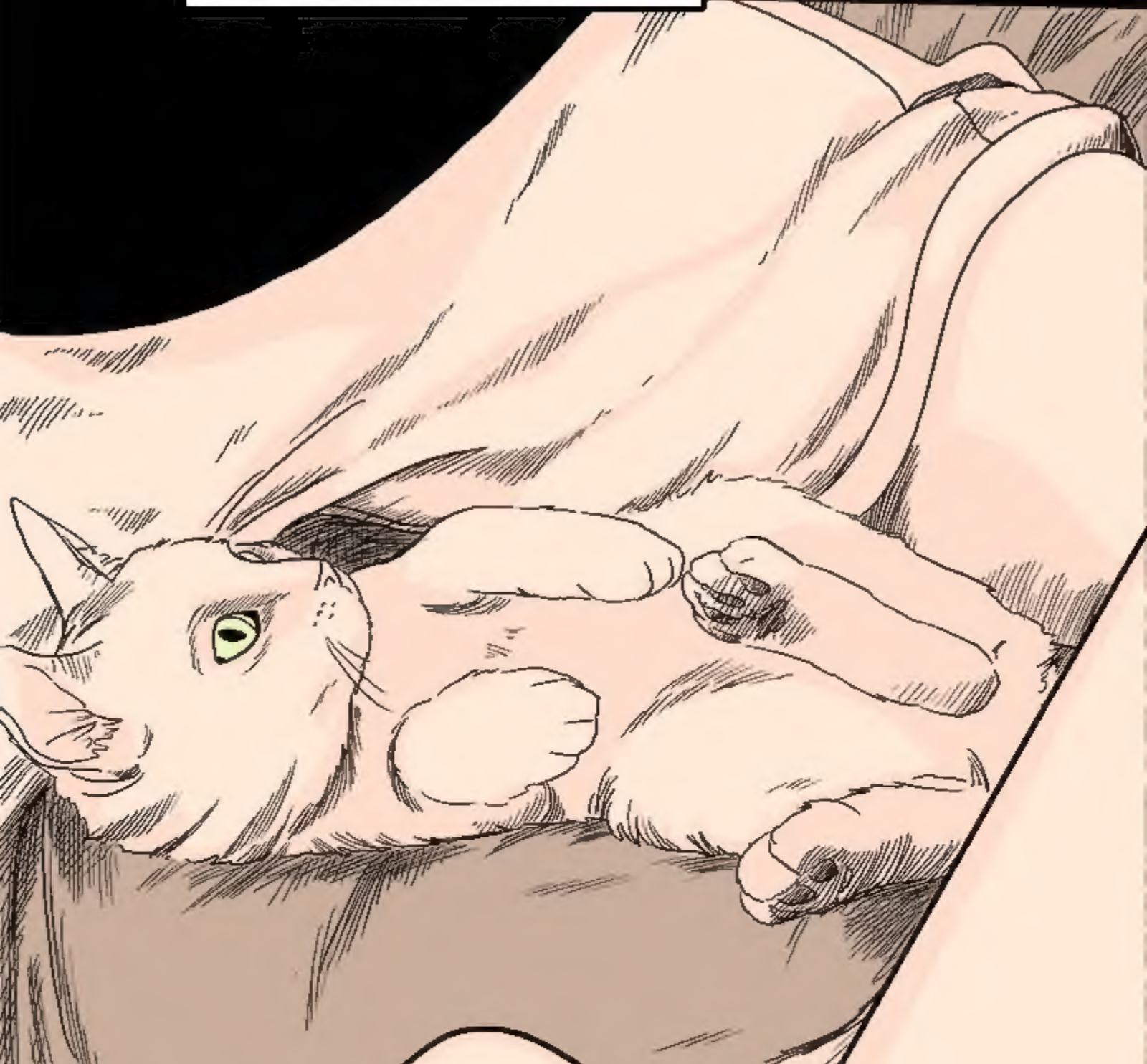


I HAD A LITTLE EXPERIENCE GIVING PIANO LESSONS, SO I SIGNED UP ON A LOCAL GIG APP AND LISTED MYSELF AS A TUTOR.



BUT THERE WEREN'T ANY BITES THE FIRST WEEK.

OR THE SECOND.



OR THE THIRD.

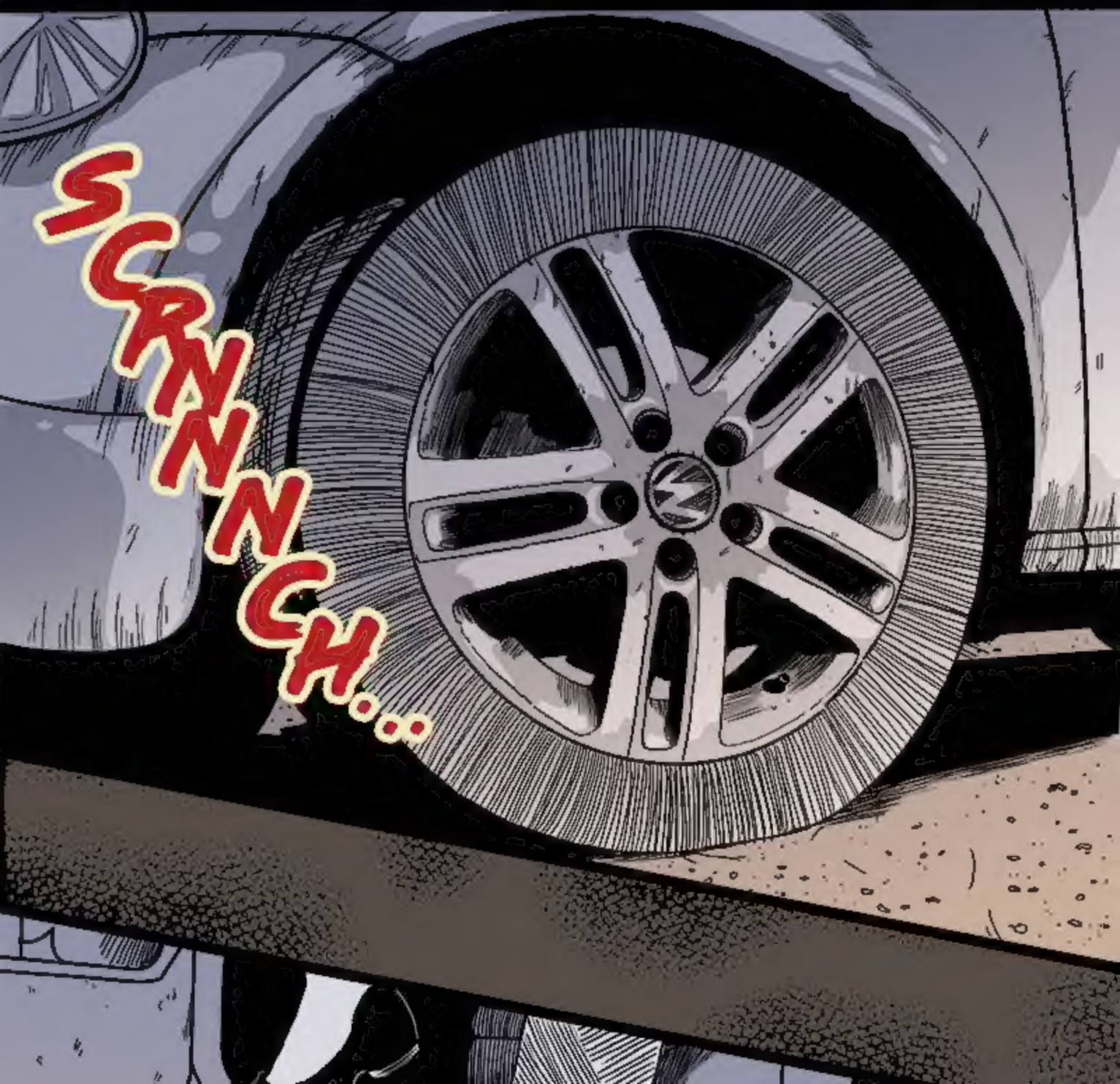
I'D GOTTEN DESPERATE ENOUGH TO LOWER MY HOURLY RATE A FEW TIMES.

FINALLY, I GOT ONE REQUEST FROM A FOSTER HOME ON THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN.

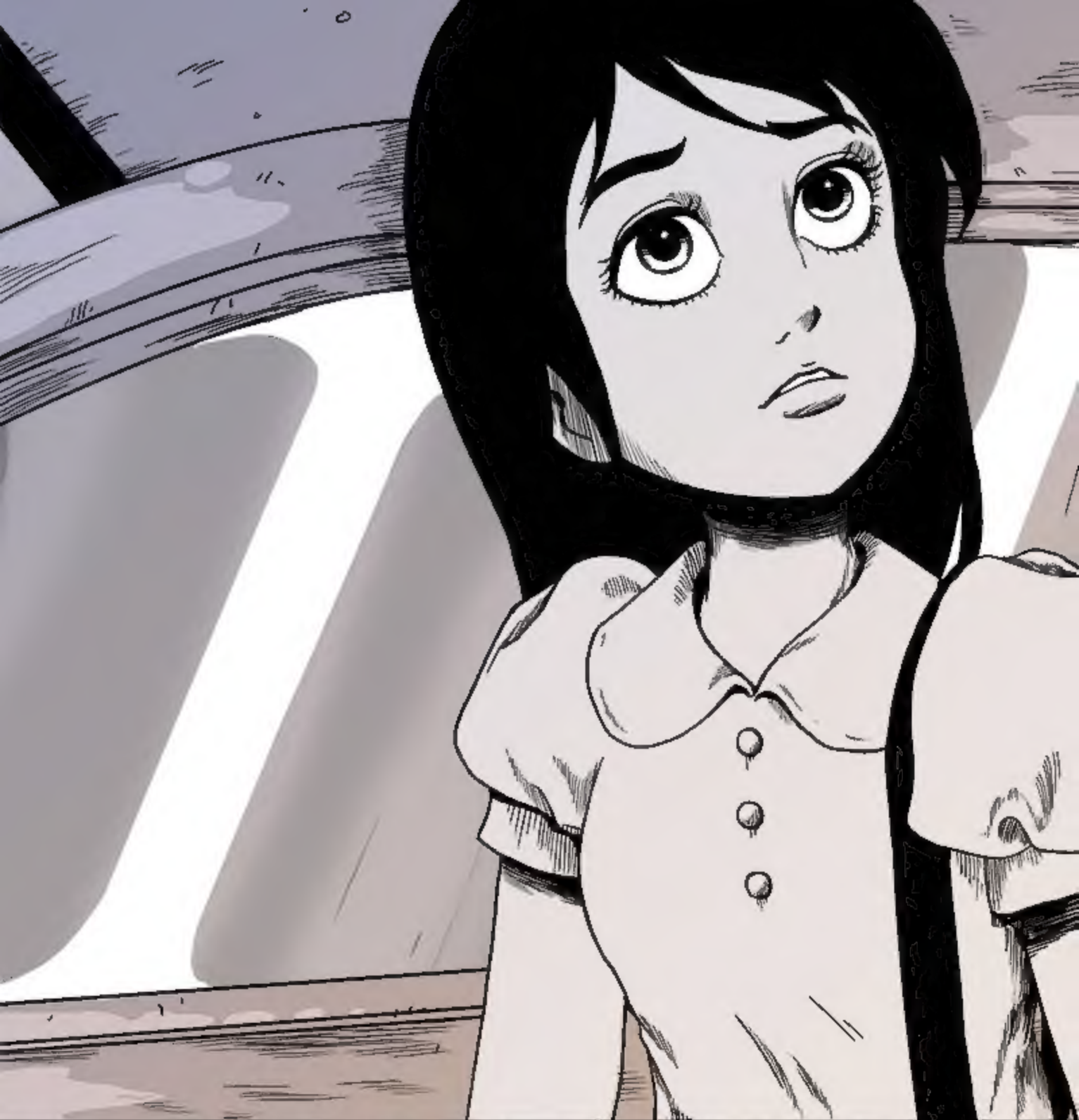
THEY WANTED ME TO GIVE AFTERNOON LESSONS TO THE CHILDREN.

I WOULD HAVE AGREED TO GIVE LESSONS TO THE FAMILY DOG AT THIS POINT, SO I JUMPED ON IT.

I DUG UP MY ONE NICE INTERVIEW BLOUSE AND HEADED OVER THE NEXT DAY.



WOW...

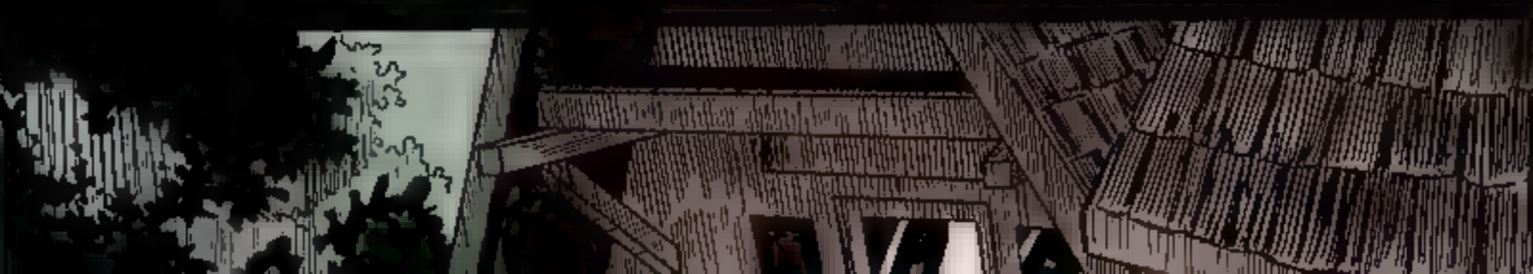


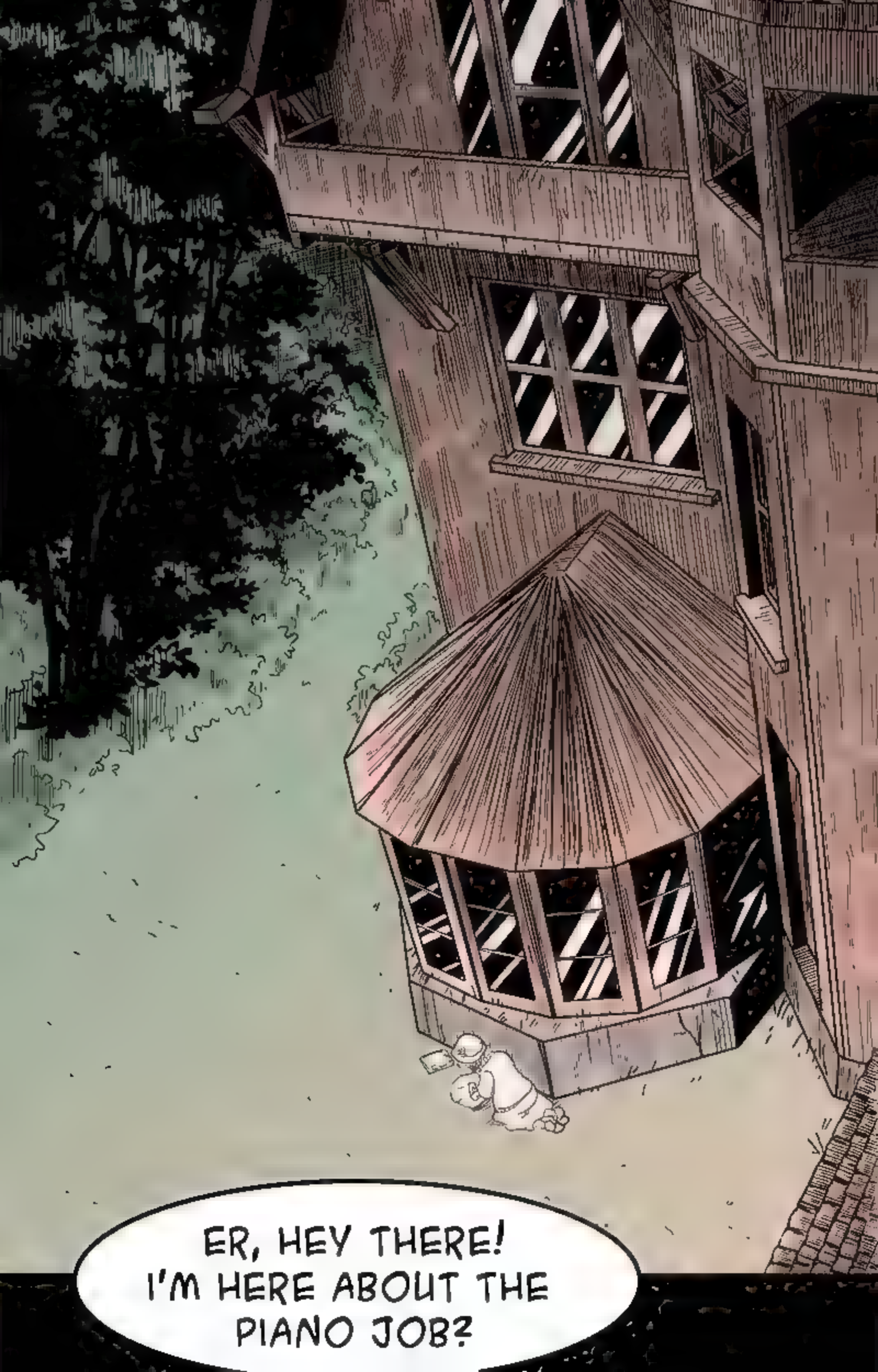
Chapter Two:

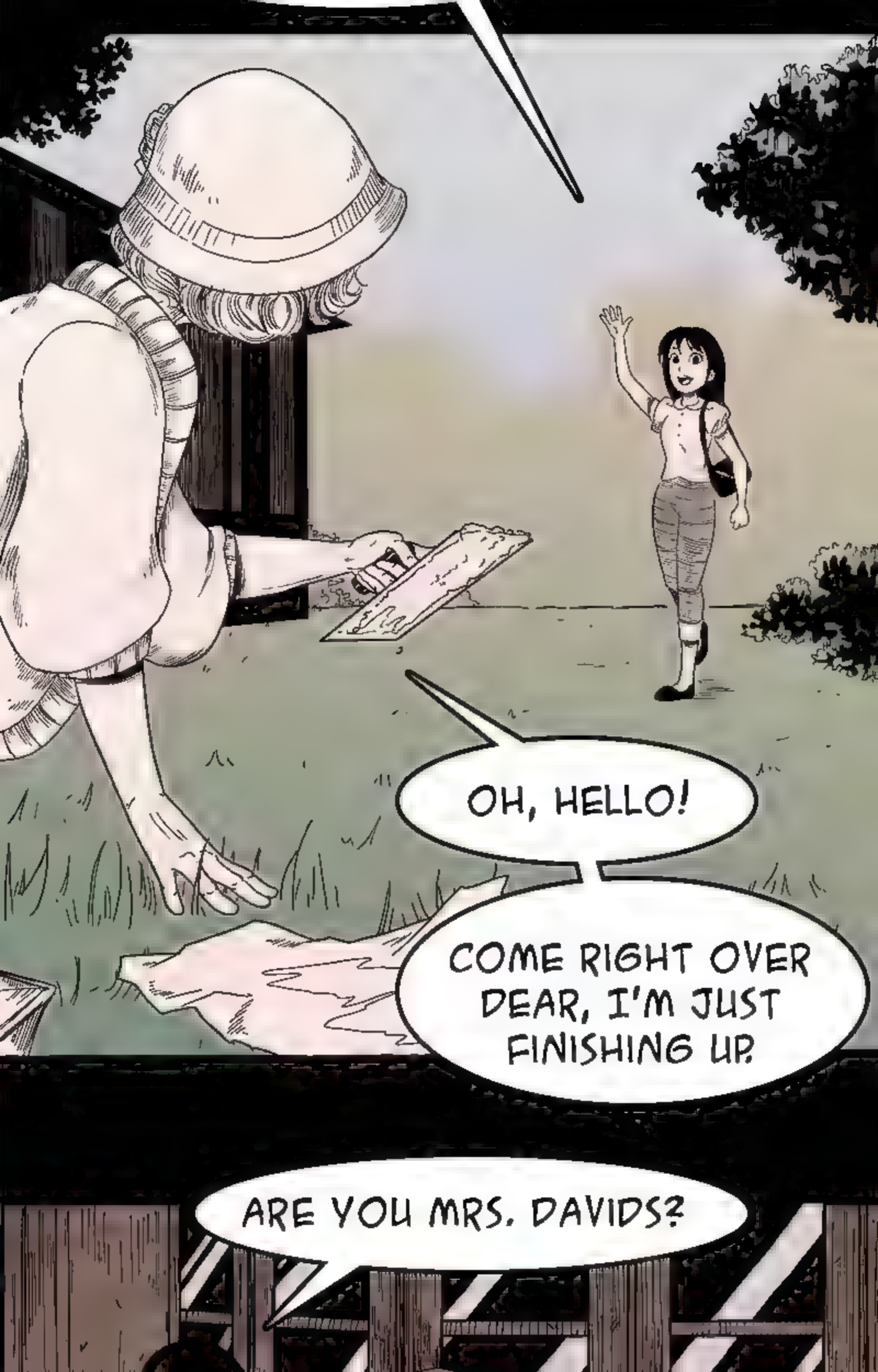
Marble House

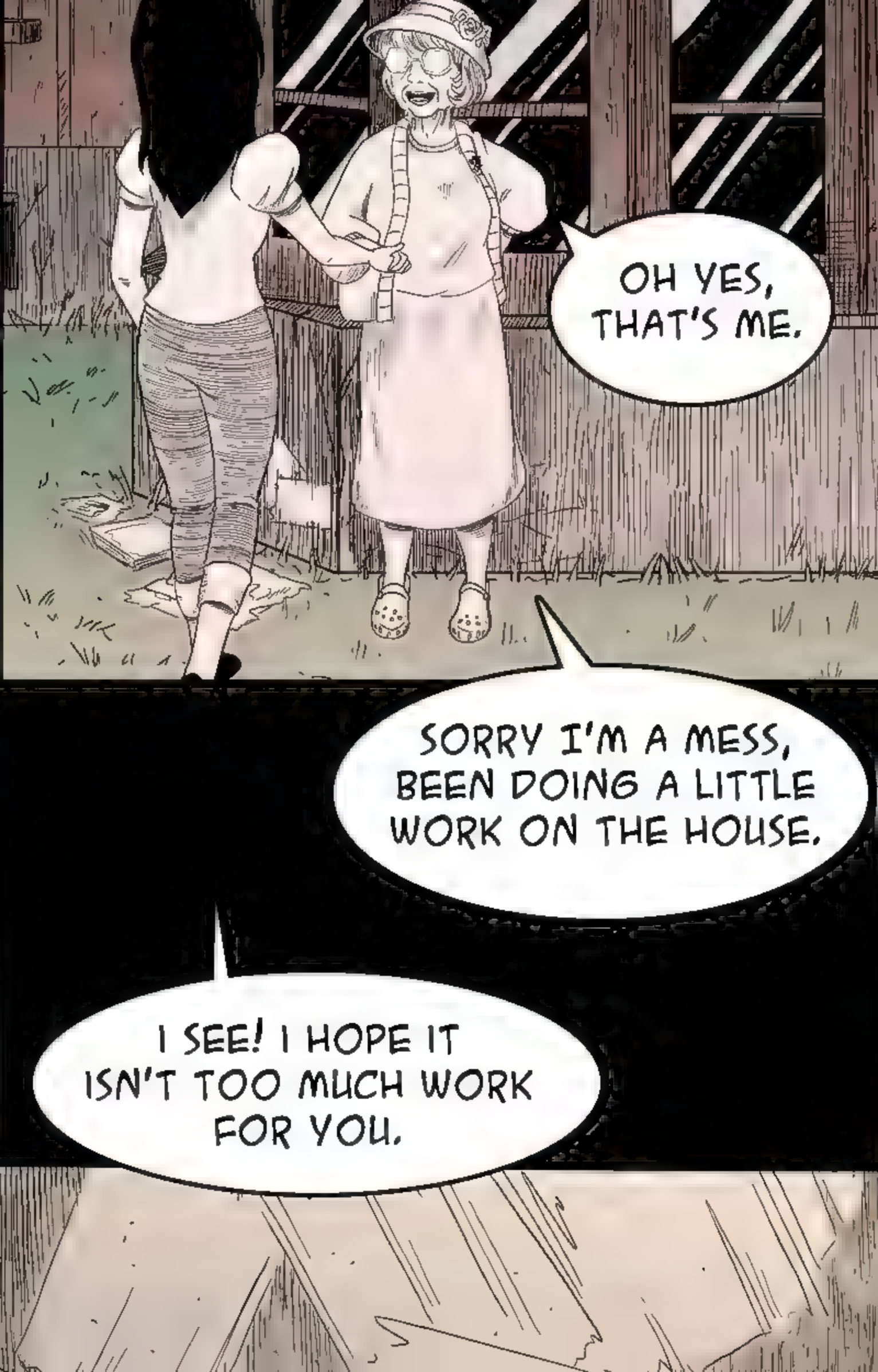
HELLO?

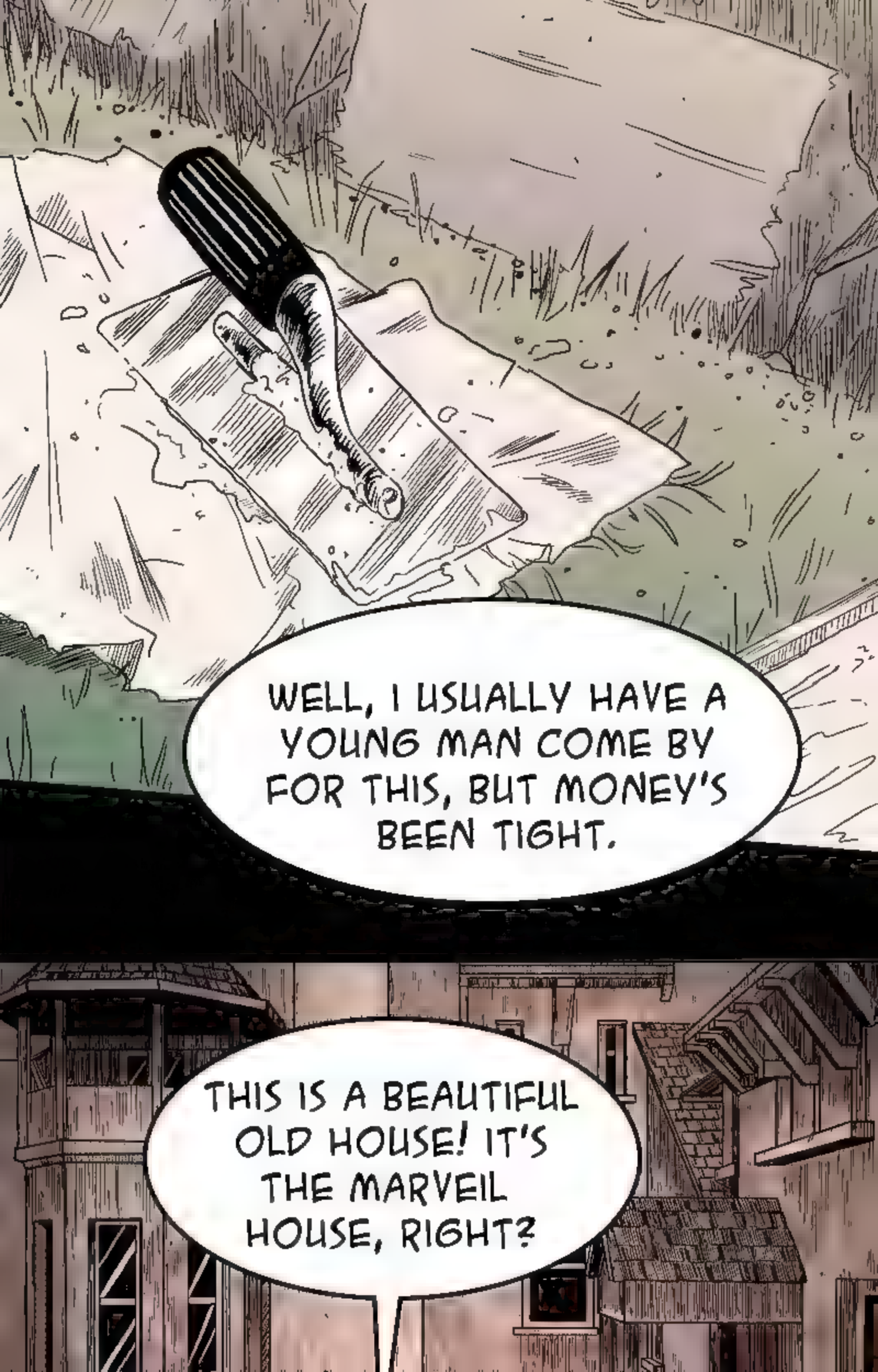
HELLO THERE!




ER, HEY THERE! I'M HERE ABOUT THE PIANO JOB?


OH, HELLO!
COME RIGHT OVER DEAR, I'M JUST FINISHING UP.
ARE YOU MRS. DAVIDS?


OH YES, THAT'S ME.
SORRY I'M A MESS, BEEN DOING A LITTLE WORK ON THE HOUSE.
I SEE! I HOPE IT ISN'T TOO MUCH WORK FOR YOU.


WELL, I USUALLY HAVE A YOUNG MAN COME BY FOR THIS, BUT MONEY'S BEEN TIGHT.
THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL OLD HOUSE! IT'S THE MARVEIL HOUSE, RIGHT?

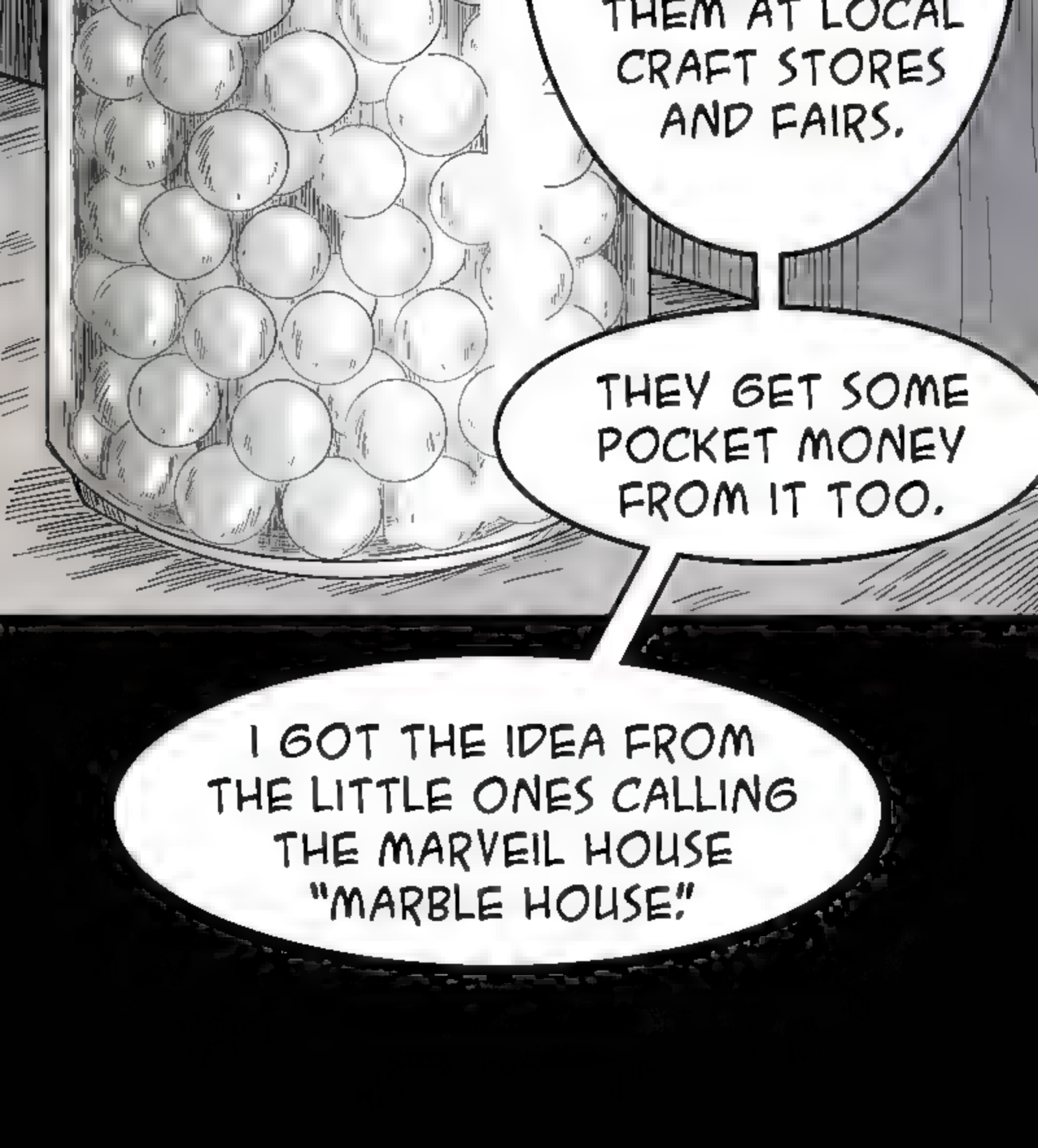
YES, BUT DON'T LET THE OLD GIRL FOOL YOU...THE FOUNDATION IS JUST ABOUT CRUMBLING AWAY. WE'RE HOPING TO SELL AND MOVE SOMEWHERE ELSE SOON.

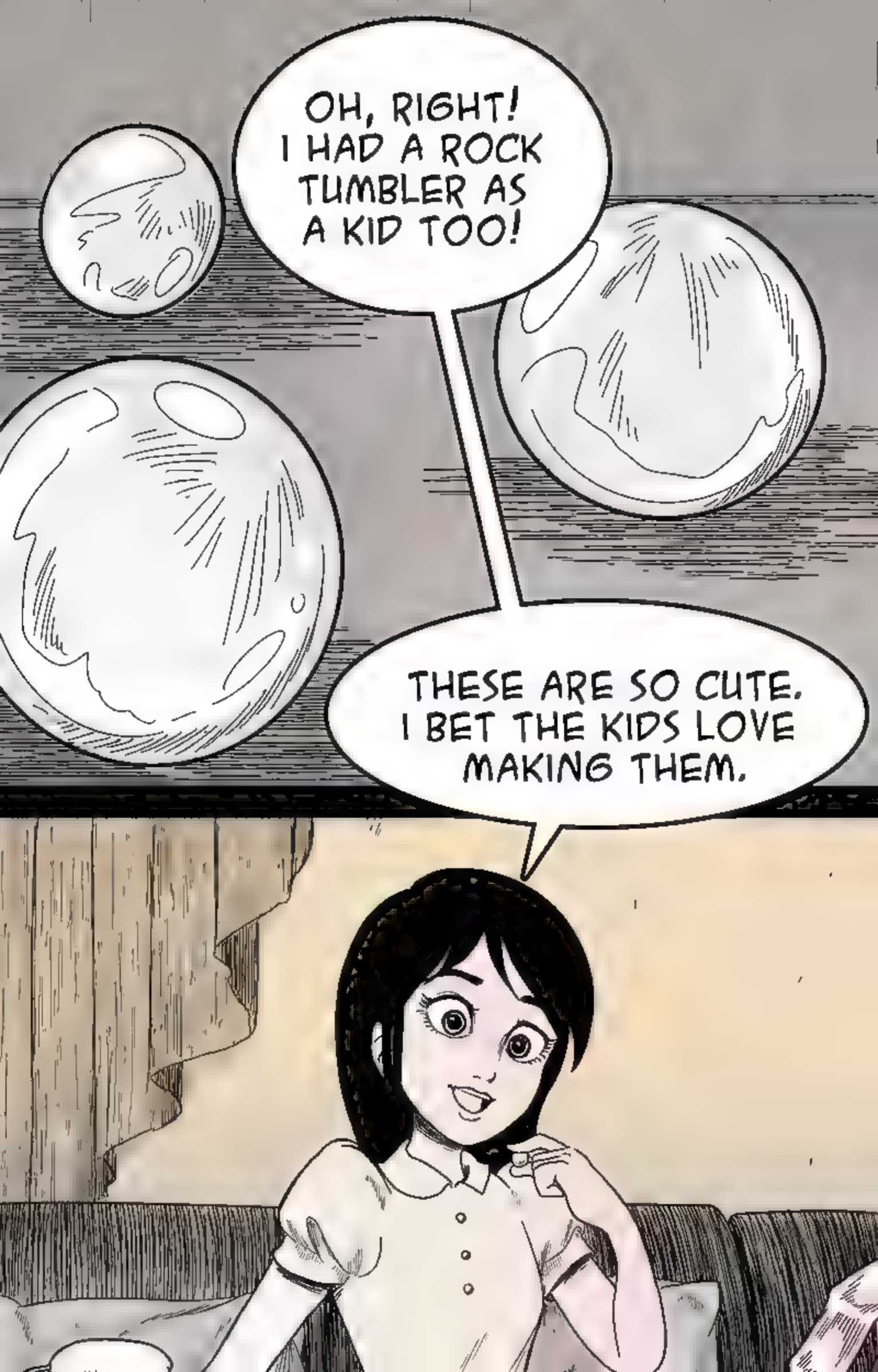
SO FRANKIE, TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

OH, WELL...I GREW UP IN TOWN, BUT I ONLY JUST RETURNED AFTER COLLEGE. I WORK FROM HOME NOW.
I THOUGHT I'D GIVE SOME MUSIC LESSONS JUST AS A SIDE BUSINESS.
OH, I CAN

UNDERSTAND. MONEY SEEMS TIGHT WITH EVERYONE THESE DAYS.
I TRY TO OCCUPY THE CHILDREN WITH ACTIVITIES WITHIN OUR BUDGET.
I THOUGHT PIANO MIGHT BE VERY INTERESTING FOR THEM.
RIGHT NOW, THEY'RE VERY INTO ROCK

POLISHING.
YOU KNOW, TO MAKE LITTLE MARBLES?
MM-HMM.
IT'S A CHEAP HOBBY AND THE KIDS LOVE IT...THEY MAKE THE MARBLES AND WE SELL


THEM AT LOCAL CRAFT STORES AND FAIRS.
THEY GET SOME POCKET MONEY FROM IT TOO.
I GOT THE IDEA FROM THE LITTLE ONES CALLING THE MARVEIL HOUSE "MARBLE HOUSE."


OH, RIGHT! I HAD A ROCK TUMBLER AS A KID TOO!
THESE ARE SO CUTE. I BET THE KIDS LOVE MAKING THEM.

OH YES, I CAN HARDLY GET THEM TO STOP.
HEY, SINCE YOU'RE HERE, WHY DON'T I CALL THEM DOWN TO MEET YOU?
THEY'LL BE SO EXCITED!

KIDS, CAN EVERYONE COME DOWN FOR A MINUTE?
I HAVE A BIG SURPRISE!

OH YES, ONE THING FIRST. I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND, BUT...
SOME OF THE KIDS HAVE TO WEAR MASKS FOR MEDICAL REASONS.
OH, SHOULD I WEAR ONE TOO?

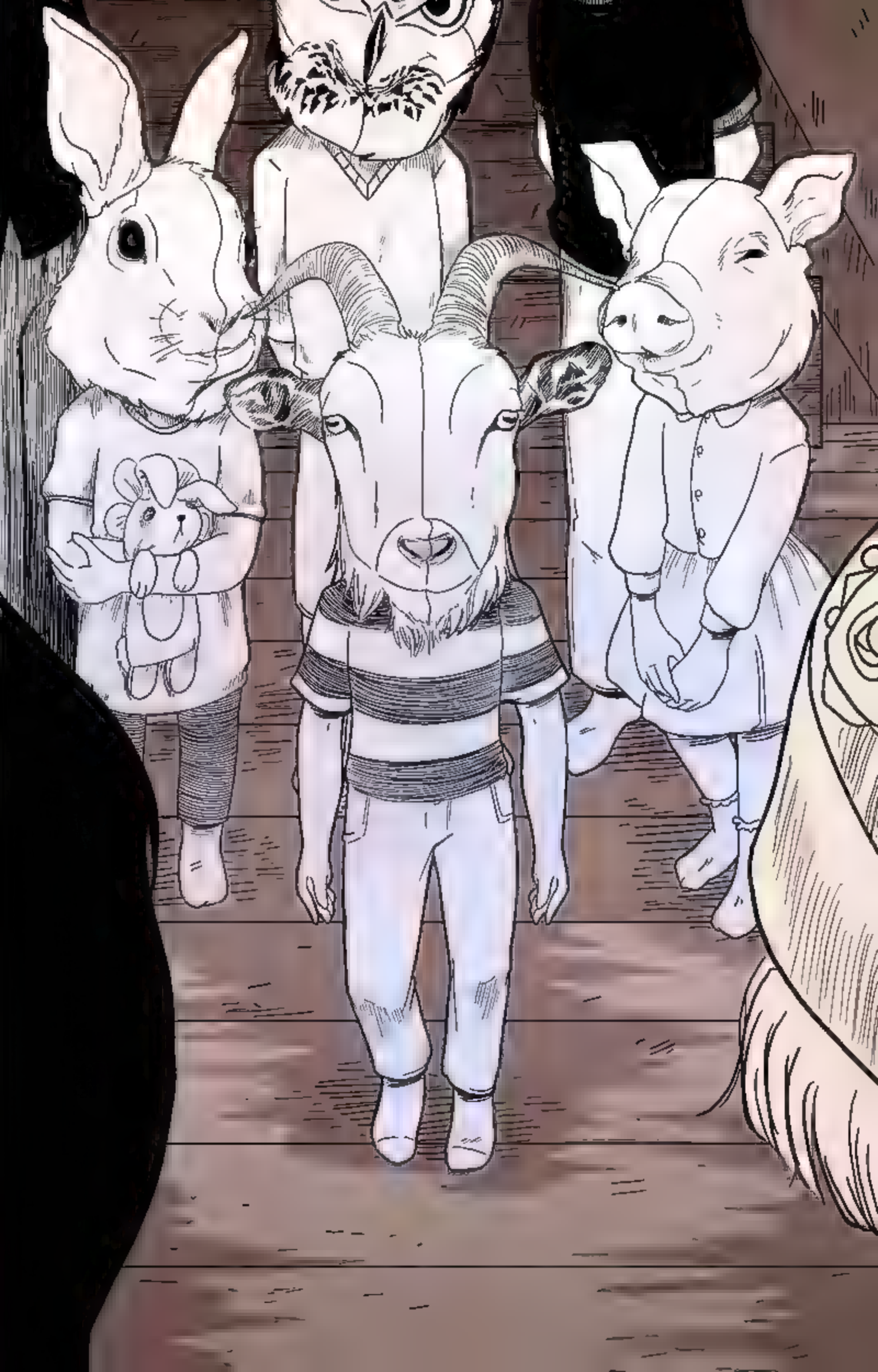
NO NO, YOU'RE FINE. IT'S JUST A SMALL PRECAUTION. WE TRY TO MAKE IT FUN BY DECORATING THEIR MASKS.
BAM!
BANG

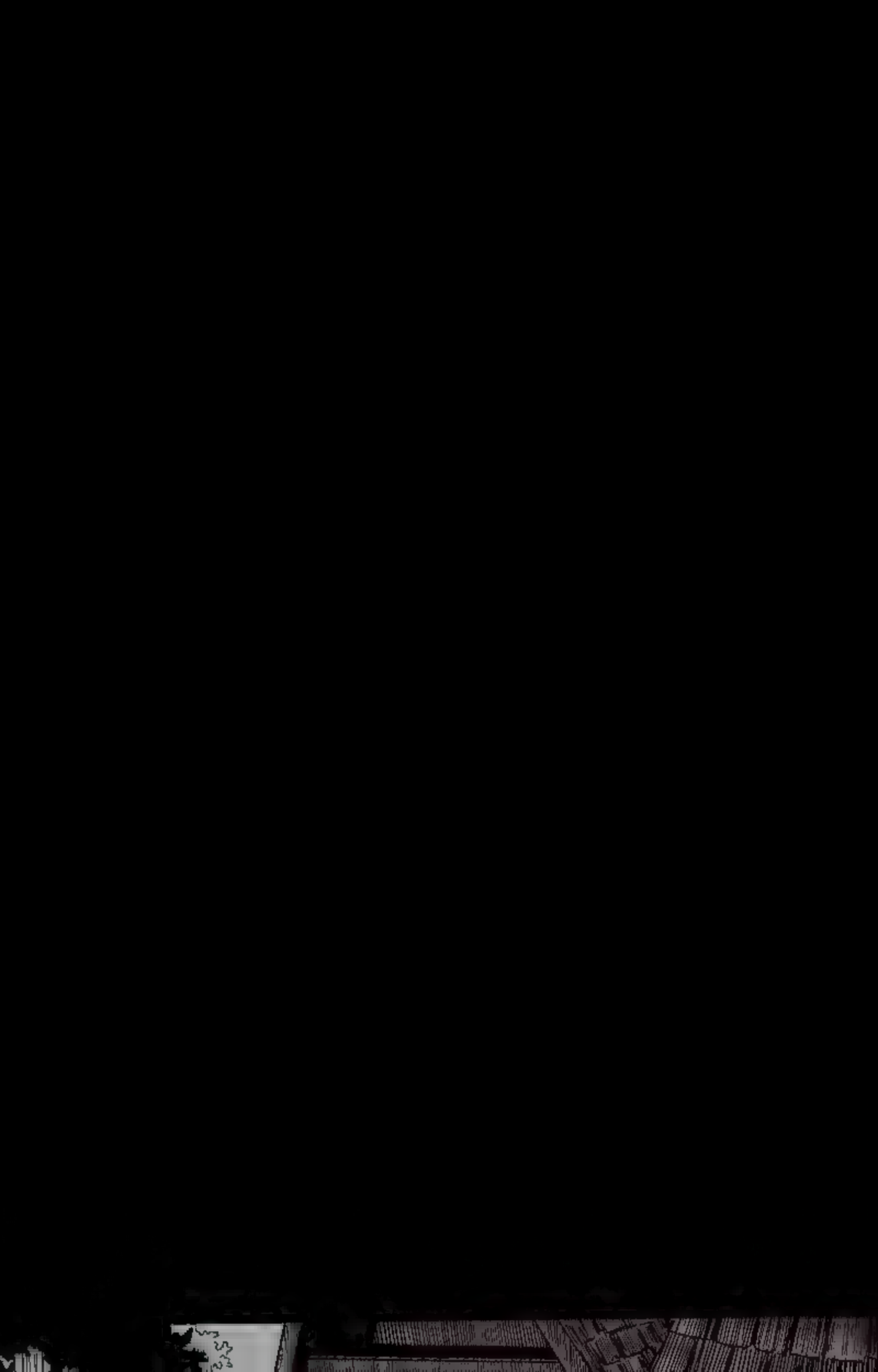
BOOM
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP

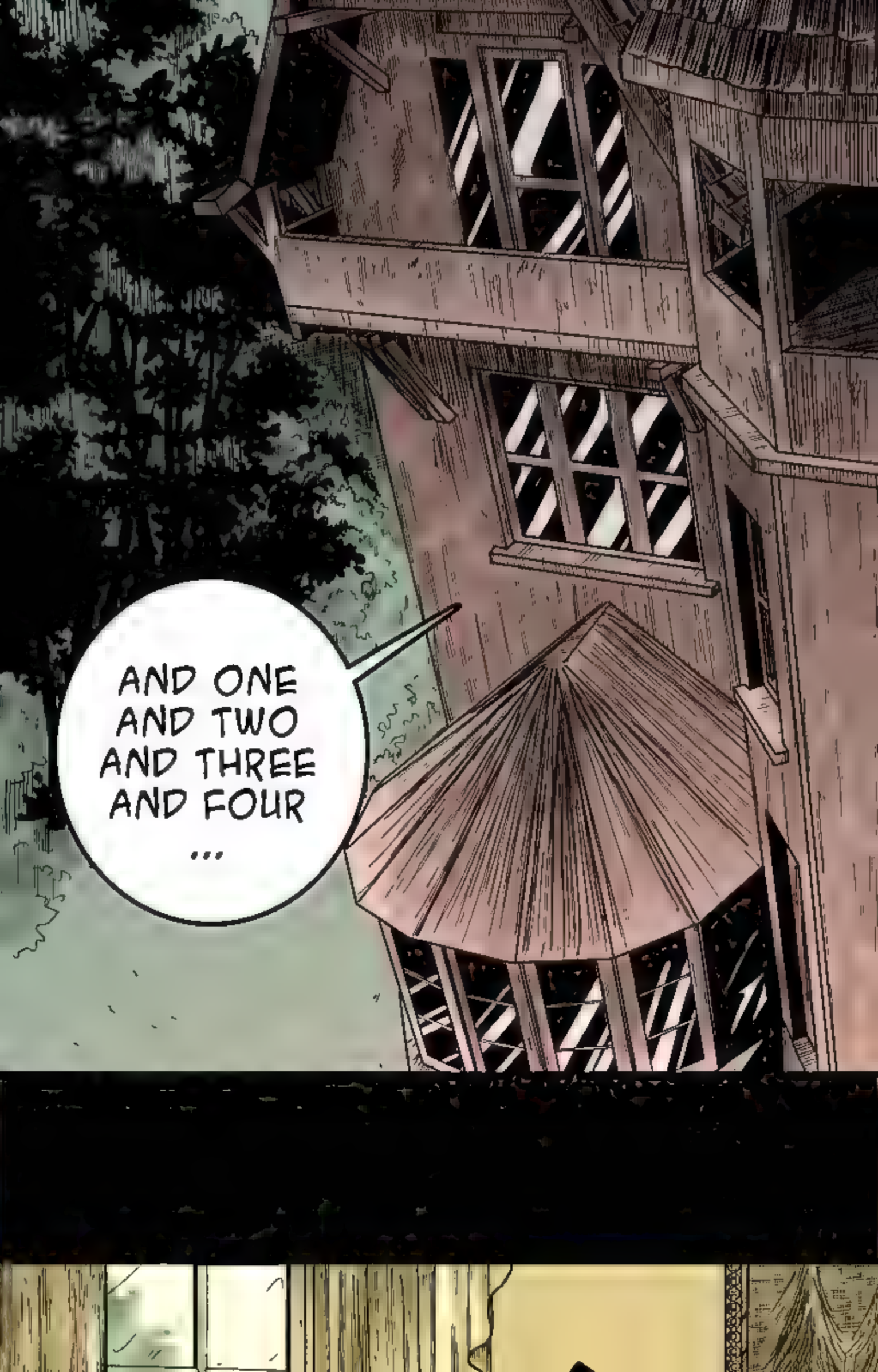
HEY, WHAT DID I SAY ABOUT RUNNING ON THE STAIRS, GUYS?

GASP!

OKAY NOW...
WHO'S READY TO LEARN THE *PIANO*?

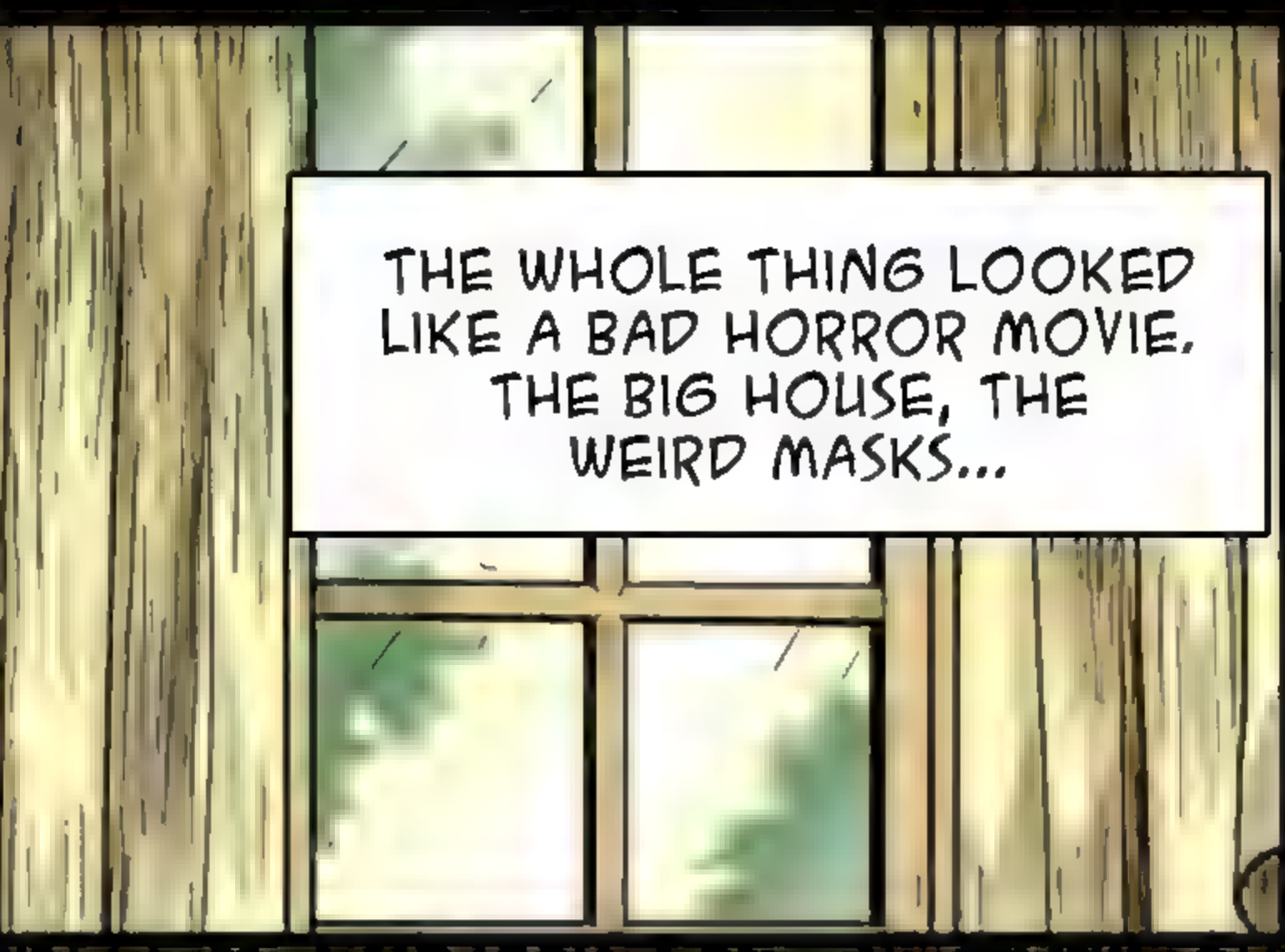





AND ONE
AND TWO
AND THREE
AND FOUR
...

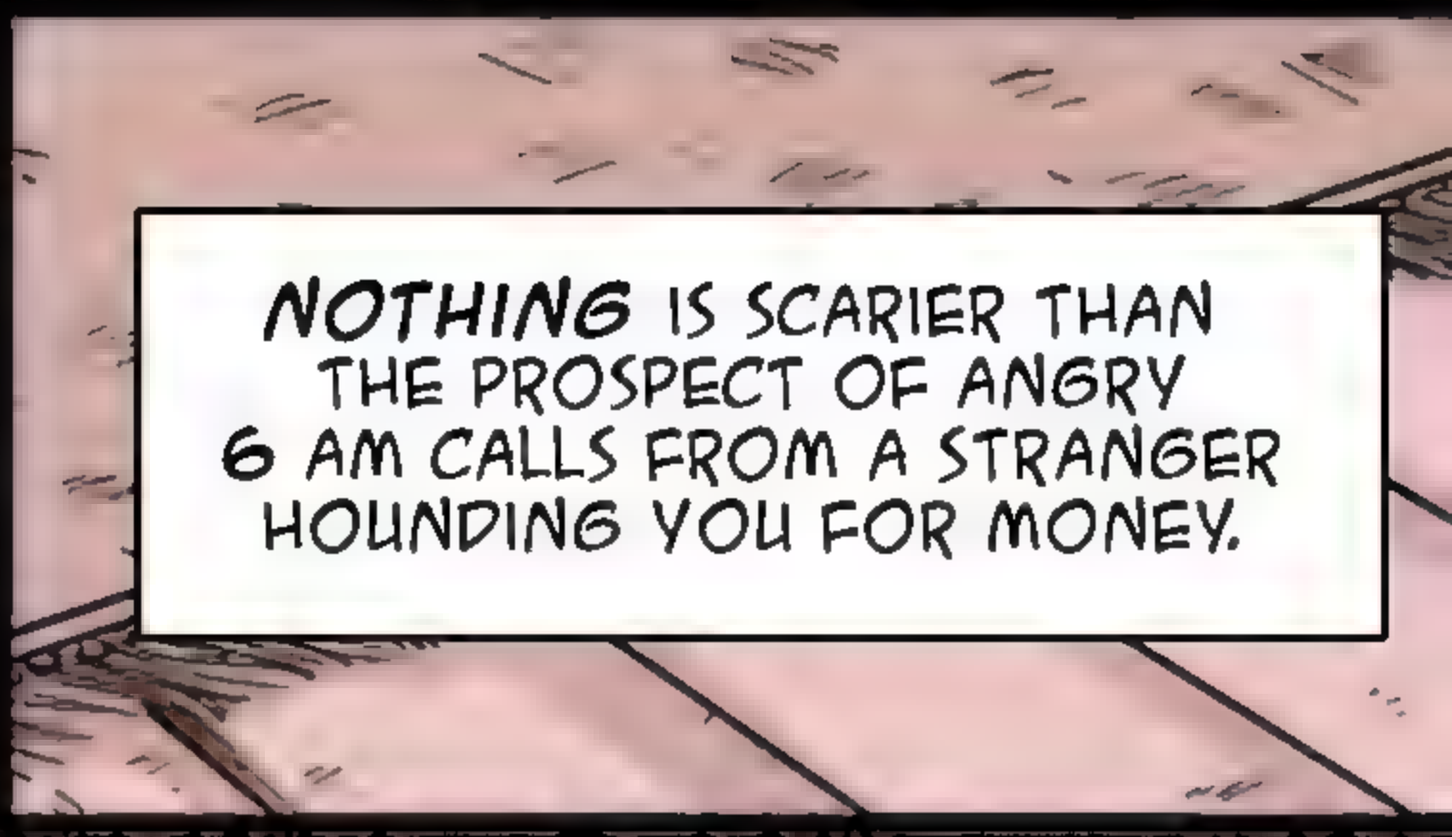
IT HAD BEEN TWO WEEKS SINCE I STARTED GIVING LESSONS AT THE MARBLE HOUSE.

TO BE HONEST, I WANTED TO JUST LEAVE AFTER THAT FIRST DAY.



BUT NOTHING ELSE UNUSUAL

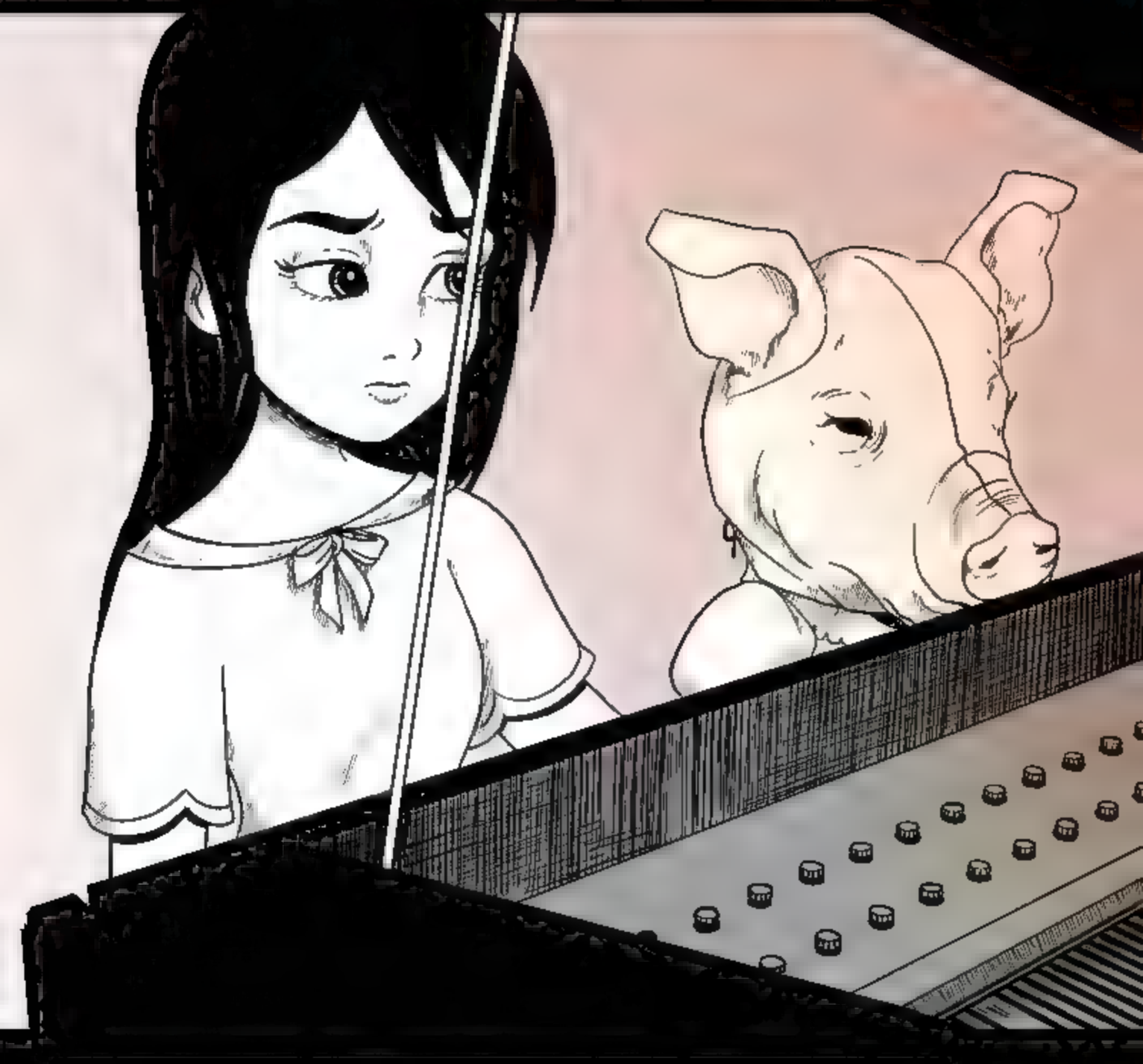
HAPPENED, AND I FIGURED I AT LEAST NEEDED TO STICK IT OUT FOR A HANDFUL OF LESSONS, OR I'D BE FACING CALLS FROM DEBT COLLECTORS.



AND ONCE I STARTED THE LESSONS, WELL...

I GOT USED TO IT. MORE

OR LESS.



AT FIRST, THE KIDS WERE ALL VERY SHY AROUND ME AND IT MADE ME WONDER WHY.

MAYBE THIS WAS A HOME FOR KIDS WITH BIRTH DEFECTS OR

DISFIGUREMENTS, AND THE MASKS WERE THERE TO MAKE THEM FEEL SAFER.

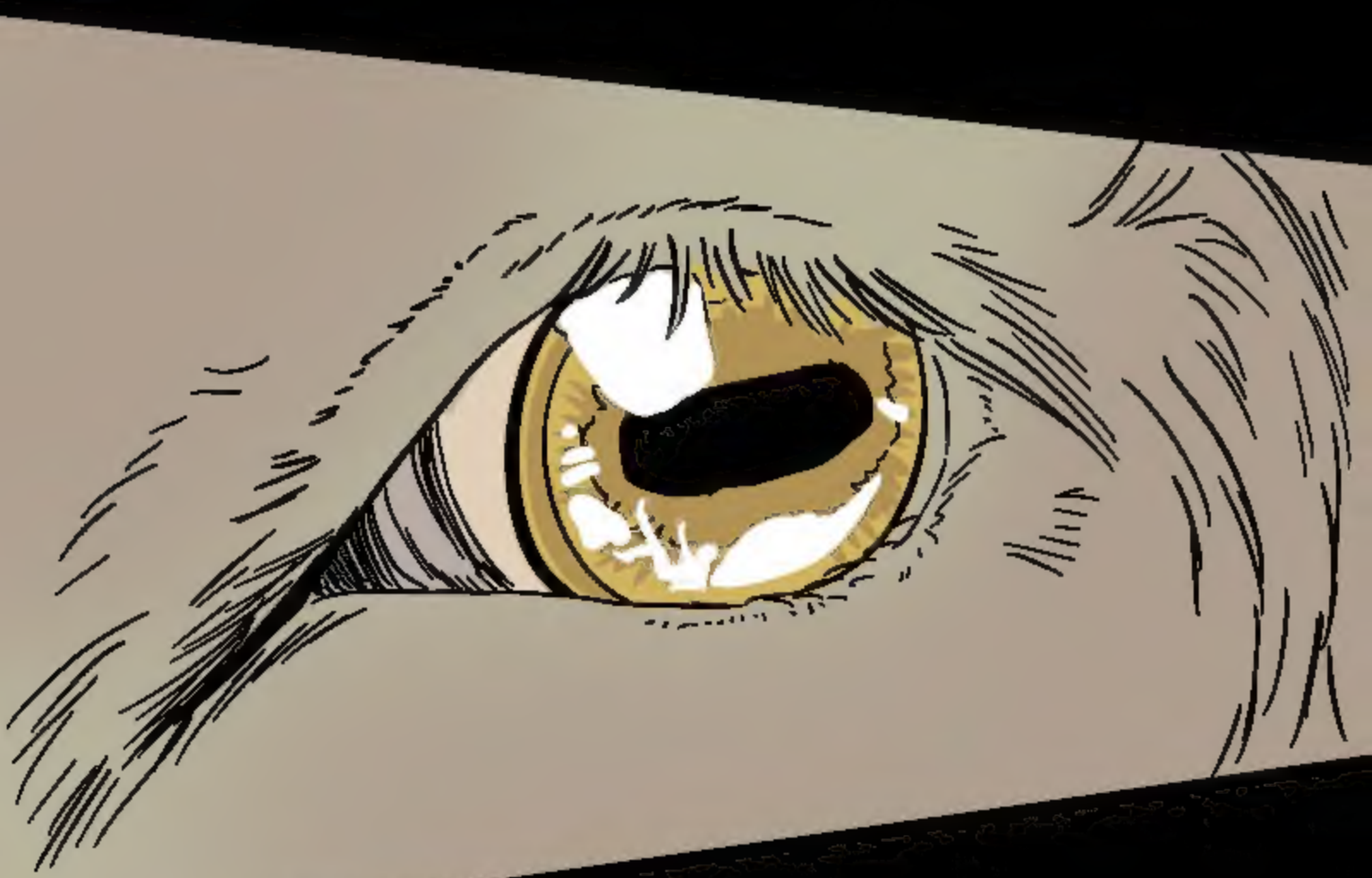
MORE NORMAL.

IT'S HARD TO BE SCARED OF A LITTLE KID IF THERE'S JUST SOMETHING WRONG WITH HOW THEY LOOK.

I MEAN, BESIDES THE MASKS, THEY WERE JUST NORMAL KIDS.

THEY DUG IN THE SANDBOX OUT BACK, THEY MADE LITTLE ROCK TUMBLER MARBLES, THEY STAYED INSIDE ON RAINY DAYS AND FINGERPAINTED AND DID DUMB LITTLE KID THINGS.

I COULDN'T FIND ANYTHING TO COMPLAIN ABOUT.



UNTIL THE START OF THE THIRD WEEK.